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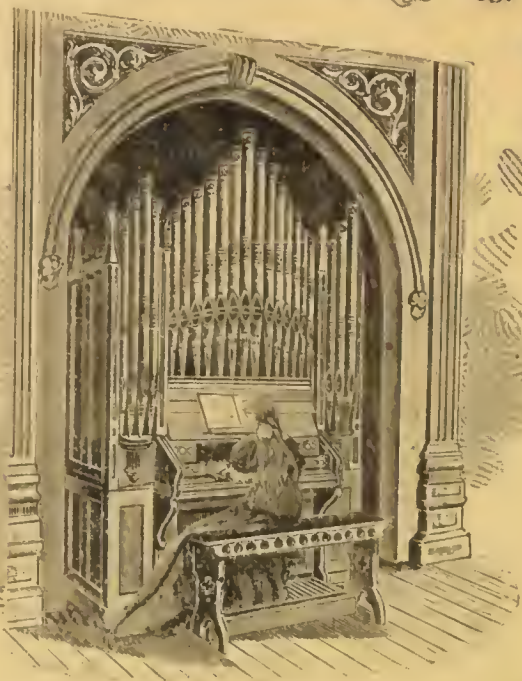
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THE CAUSES OF THE DECREASE OF BIRDS.

By Clarence Moores Weed.



UT of all the recent discussion regarding birds the fact seems well established that birds as a class are now less numerous in the United States than they were a century or more ago. While some species have doubtless become more abundant under the changed conditions of modern civilization, others are very much rarer, and a few appear to be approaching extinction. It, of course, was inevitable that the changes produced by man's interference with natural conditions should exert a tremendous influence upon the native fauna: some birds have found the new dispensation better suited to their wants than the old; others have changed their habits and made the best of it; while others have

been so relentlessly persecuted that their only hope of survival lay in retreating to inaccessible swamps or cliffs. The wholesale destruction of primeval nesting sites has been a potent factor in the changes produced, but fortunately many of the most useful birds have found substitutes that answered the purpose very well: the swallows, for example, have gone from hollow trees to the eaves and rafters of barns, and the swifts from trees to chimneys. The great increase of meadow land has encouraged the development and distribution of birds like the meadow lark, originally confined to the prairies, while the decrease of forests has tended to the suppression of species like the passenger pigeon that lived largely on acorns, beech nuts, or other forest products.

Granite monthly. 1797. 25

But besides the natural and inevitable results of the white man's occupation of the American continent, certain causes have been and still are at work which tend greatly to decrease the number of birds possible under existing conditions. To a large extent these agencies are the result of human greed, cruelty, and ignorance, and the havoc they cause may be greatly checked by proper laws based upon and supported by the opinion of an enlightened public.

Perhaps one of the most constant and serious of these agencies is the egg-collecting or nest-destroying boy. In almost every town and village there may be found a dozen or more youths who have frequent attacks of the collecting fever. Unfortunately the fever is often of the intermittent type, and the season's collections are allowed to go to ruin before the advent of another spring. Every nook and cranny for miles around the headquarters of such a coterie is examined by sharp eyes, and the great majority of birds' eggs are gathered in. Probably with ninety-nine boys out of a hundred these egg collections are soon forgotten, while the hundredth boy is too likely to become a mere collector who strives to see how many varieties of eggs he can get together without reference to the natural history of the subject. To this class of collectors we owe the existence of the egg-dealers who collect eggs in large numbers to sell. The latter are the mercenary collectors, while the intermittent types are the aimless ones—a classification suggested by Col. W. H. M. Duthie, a Scottish ornithologist who well defines "the true collector" as "a naturalist ac-

quainting himself with birds, their habits, flight, migration, and breeding haunts, his egg collecting being only one of the means of acquiring knowledge."

Birds' eggs are sometimes collected by children to serve as Easter gifts the following season,—a sacrilege to which attention need scarcely be called to reveal its inappropriateness. Such an Easter present is a sacrifice of innocence rather than a thank-offering.

Unfortunately the boy of the period does not limit his destructive powers to the gathering of eggs. The recent increase in cheap firearms has placed within his reach the means of killing feathered "game" at all seasons of the year. To this fact is due much of the diminution in the numbers of small birds in the vicinity of towns and cities. Dr. R. W. Schufeldt thinks that the wholesale destruction carried on by the army of unscrupulous small boys is a reason for bird decrease, before which other reasons "stand aghast." He reports meeting near Washington, D. C., "one such youngster, and upon examining his game bag found it absolutely crammed full of dead bodies which he had killed since starting out in the morning. One item alone consisted of seventy-two ruby and golden-crowned kinglets. The fellow boasted of having slain over one hundred cat-birds that season."

That the small boy is recognized in other countries as a prime factor in the decrease of birds is shown by the recent recommendation of a committee of the British association for the advancement of science that particular pains should be taken to in-

struct the youth concerning the birds that should be protected.

Enormous numbers of birds are sacrificed annually for millinery purposes. There is an opinion prevalent that the birds worn on women's hats in America are largely derived from the faunas of tropical regions. Some justification of this is to be found in the impossible colors of all sorts assumed by the plainest songsters when they have passed through the dye-pot of the preparator. But there can be no question that an immense quantity of bird-life is annually destroyed in the United States to gratify the caprice of fashion, the birds thus killed being very largely used within our own borders, while many are exported to Paris and other European cities. The evidence on this point is abundantly sufficient; some of it may properly be introduced here as the subject is one which is greatly in need of more general knowledge on the part of the public.

An editorial article in *Forest and Stream* a few years ago (March 6, 1884) mentions a dealer, who, during a three-months' trip to the coast of South Carolina last spring, prepared no less than 11,018 bird skins. A considerable number of the birds killed were, of course, too much mutilated for preparation, so that the total number slain would be much greater than the number given. The person referred to states that he handles, on an average, 30,000 bird skins a year, of which the greater part are cut up for millinery purposes.

About the same time, according to a writer in the *Baltimore Sun*, a New York milliner visited Cobb's island, off the coast of Virginia, to get ma-

terial to fill a foreign order for 40,000 bird skins. She hired people to kill the victims, paying ten cents apiece for the latter. "The birds comprised in this wholesale slaughter are mainly the different species of gulls and terns, or sea swallows, of which many species in large numbers could formerly be found upon this island. But now only a few of these graceful birds remain, and the pot-hunters, or rather skin hunters, have to go some distance to carry out their cruel scheme. If we consider that with each old bird killed,—and only old birds have a suitable plumage,—also many of the young birds, still unable to take care of themselves, are doomed to starvation, this wholesale slaughter becomes still more infamous and criminal."

Further south, in Florida and along the gulf coast, the herons and egrets have been ruthlessly persecuted for their plumage. The heronries, where enormous numbers of graceful birds formerly bred unmolested, have been largely broken up, and only the shyness of those remaining enables them to survive. It is said that a milliner's agent recently visited Texas in the hope of procuring the plumes of 10,000 white egrets. One trusts that it was "a hope deferred."

This slaughter of the innocents is by no means confined to our Southern states. During four months 70,000 bird skins were supplied to the New York trade by one Long Island village. "On the coast line of Long Island," wrote Mr. Wm. Dutcher, a few years ago, "the slaughter has been carried on to such a degree that where a few years since thousands and thousands of terns were gracefully sailing over the

surf-beaten shore and the wind-rippled bays, now one is rarely to be seen." Land birds of all sorts have also suffered in a similar way, both on Long Island and in adjacent localities in New Jersey. Nor have the interior regions of the United States escaped the visits of the milliner's agent. An Indianapolis taxidermist is on record with the statement that in 1885 there were shipped from that city 5,000 bird-skins, collected in the Ohio valley. He adds that "no county in the state is free from the ornithological murderer," and prophesies that the birds will soon become very scarce in the state.

These isolated examples can only suggest the enormous numbers of birds that are sacrificed on the altar of fashion. The universal use of birds for millinery purposes bears sufficient testimony to the fact. Yet it is probable that most women who follow the fashion seldom appreciate the suffering and economic losses which it involves. A few years ago the committee on Bird Protection of the American Ornithologists' union, issued an appeal in which occurs this paragraph:

"So long as the demand continues the supply will come. Law of itself can be of little, perhaps of no ultimate, avail. It may give check, but this tide of destruction it is powerless to stay. The demand will be met; the offenders will find it worth while to dare the law. One thing only will stop this cruelty,—the disapprobation of fashion. It is our women who hold the great power. Let our women say the word and hundreds of thousands of bird lives every year will be preserved. And until woman does use her influence it is vain to

hope that this nameless sacrifice will cease until it has worked out its own end and the birds are gone."

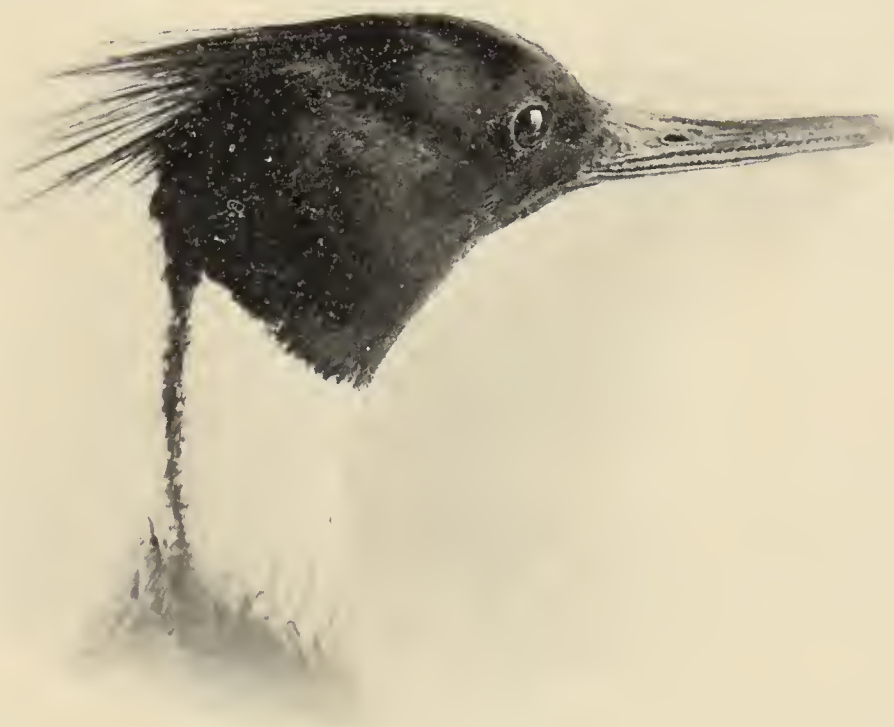
The destruction of the smaller birds for food is much greater than is commonly supposed. It is due not so much to the demand created by native, white Americans as by the foreigners in the North and the negroes in the South. During the migrations to and from the Southern regions enormous numbers of birds which are commonly considered non-edible are killed for food. In the larger cities hundreds of such victims are displayed in the markets daily. Besides the reed birds, robins, meadow-larks, and black-birds that one would naturally expect might be found, there occur wood-peckers, thrushes, sparrows, warblers, wax-wings, and vireos.

An instructive example has been reported (Zoe, II, 142) by Mr. Walter E. Bryant in the case of reed birds of the San Francisco markets. For years there have been exposed for sale small, Californian birds, picked, and six of them ranged side by side, with a skewer running through them. These are sold as reed birds, though of course they are not the Eastern bobolink which does not occur in California. They are most commonly the horned lark (*Otocoris*), but there may often be found on the skewers house-finches, gold-finches, various sparrows (except the English variety), black-birds and sand-pipers. Many thousands of birds are thus destroyed annually; the tendency, as Mr. Bryant says, is steadily "to increase in severity, and it has long since arrived at that stage of importance which should bring it to the notice of the

authorities interested in bird destruction."

In England, according to Richard Jefferies, pheasant preserves have led to the partial or total extinction of eagles, ravens, the larger hawks, and buzzards, and the horned owls, as well as, to a less extent, the barn owl and the wood owl. The kestrel and sparrow hawk have survived without great diminution in numbers notwithstanding the constant persecution to which they have been subjected since the invention of the percussion cap. The sacrifice to trout has been equally great. Jefferies records how largely the birds that feed on fish or their eggs have been

persecuted; "herons much reduced in numbers; owls, reduced; kingfishers growing scarce; coots much less numerous because not permitted to nest; grebes, reduced; wild duck, seldom seen in summer because not permitted to rest; teal, same; swans not permitted on fisheries unless ancient rites protect it; divers never numerous, now scarcer; moorhens still fairly plentiful because their ranks are constantly supplied from moats and ponds where they breed under semi-domestic conditions." These causes of bird decrease have had little influence in America and are never likely to be as important as they have been in Europe.





THE VAUGHANS: A CALIFORNIA IDYL.

By Sarah Fenton Sanborn.

CHAPTER VIII.

HE Easter Sunday dinner in the Vaughan home was a feast for the appetite as well as "a feast of reason and flow of soul."

Not many mighty were chosen as guests, nor was the number limited to the epicurean's dictum. Twice the number of the muses that hospitable board was sure to entertain. There you would find gathered Christ's "little ones," some unfortunates, the widow, perhaps the struggling artist, the poor curate, the unknown poet, the school teacher, a poor collegian or divinity student, and many who had been reduced from better days.

"*Noblesse oblige*" was a maxim in the life of Madame Vaughan.

Good talk there was. The society columns did not chronicle those dinners but they were cordials to the hungry, oases to the hopes and memories of many a life.

When Victor was summoned to dinner he was feeding his pet canaries, Gratz keeping up a prodigious tail-wagging over his savory bone. Victor was coaxing,

"Sing now birdies, sing and say,
Christ the Lord is risen to-day,
Let your little voices ring,
Sing sweet birdies, sing, oh sing."

Reluctantly the child left his birds for the dinner table, where he was seated by his grandmother. His father noticed his downcast look, and that he left his soup untasted.

"Are you ill, my child?" he enquired, anxiously.

"No, Papa."

"Are you not hungry?"



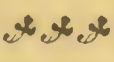


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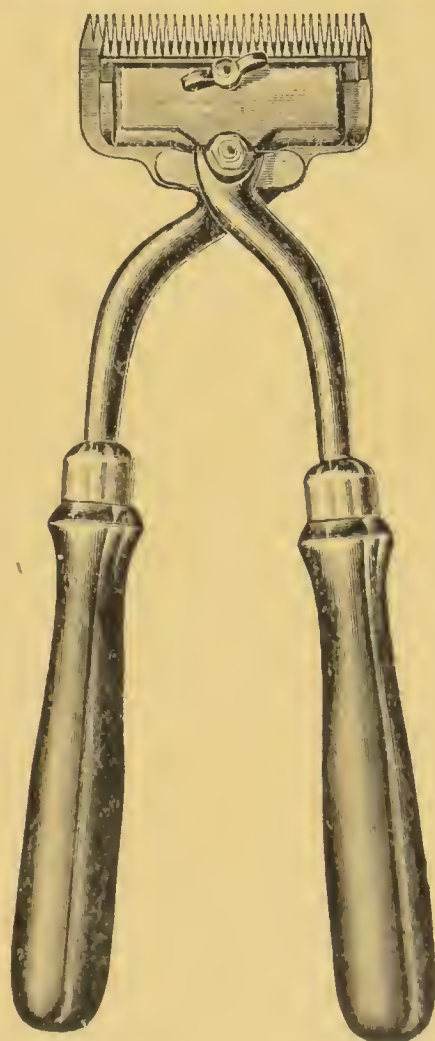
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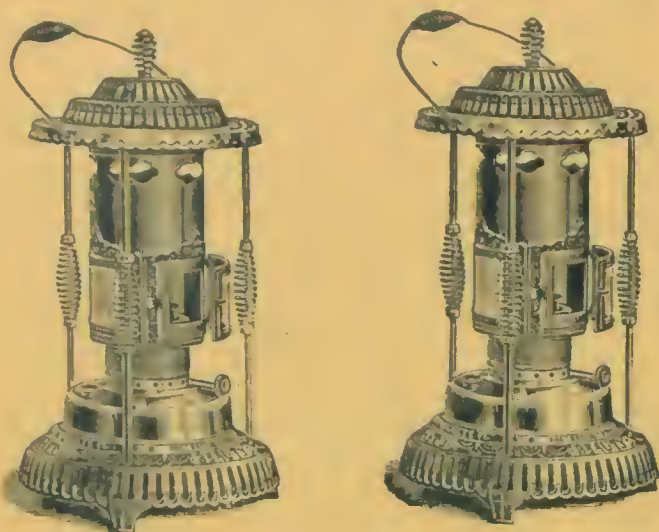
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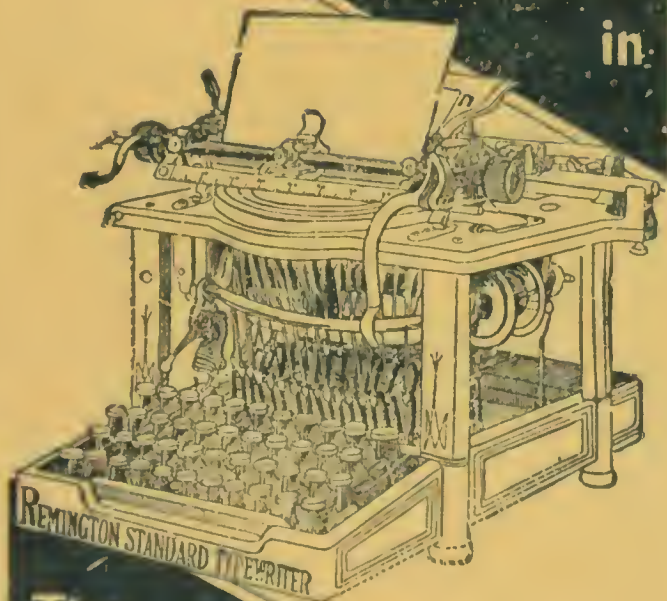
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